

Interview with Laurent E. Morin

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

LAURENT E. MORIN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: March 24, 1992

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: Today is March 24, 1992. This is an interview with Laurent E. Morin on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Could you tell a bit about your background...where you were born, grew up, and education?

MORIN: I was born in Augusta, Maine in 1920 and grew up in Massachusetts, Ohio and then mostly New Hampshire. I subsequently attended the University of New Hampshire. I went off to war, World War II. I was in the Navy and had combat duty both in Europe and then the Pacific.

Q: First let's get back to the university. What was your major and interest at that time?

MORIN: I originally finished as an economics major and graduated in 1943. I went back to school after the war and got another major and another degree in 1947, this time in history.

Q: Where did you serve in the military and what sort of action did you see?

Library of Congress

MORIN: I was a Navy officer, a small boat officer, in the amphibs. I was in a landing craft unit, comprising LCVP's and LCM's carried aboard an attack transport. Our boats worked the large cargo ships and troop carriers hauling men and material to the invasion beach.

My first combat was in Normandy. Our ship dropped us off about ten miles off-shore and picked up troops from other ships. I hit the beach about five or six hours after H hour. I was commanding the 22nd wave and hit the beach at Easy Red which happened to be the heart of the heaviest combat.

Q: That was Omaha?

MORIN: Easy Red is in the middle of Omaha beach. The underwater obstacles were bad, and I had to pick our way through the jumble of posts, timber and barbed wire along channels cleared by shell fire, with the other twelve boats following. I didn't lose any boats, but five others from my ship were sunk.

Subsequently our ship was sent to the Mediterranean for the invasion of southern France two months later. We went in with troops from Naples to the beaches next to Saint Tropez. There I was commander of the 4th wave. My boat sank; it hit a mine on top of a post. The mine didn't go off because it was set for a heavier ship but the hull was staved in. We made it to the shore, and I stayed on the beach the rest of the day trying to repair the thing.

It was a lovely day in August and we were sitting on the beach getting suntans. A soldier came crawling down the beach said that we had to dig in because they were expecting an 88 barrage and we had better get under cover. I had four sailors with me in this particular boat and I told them we had better start digging a trench. One of the sailors started digging away with a small shovel. He was jabbing away, and I said, "My God, that's not how you dig for mines. You have to be awful careful." There were signs in German warning of mines all around us. I said, "You put your hand in front of the shovel and you push down

Library of Congress

into the sand until you feel some metal. If you don't feel any metal you're okay." This fellow sort of blanched and said, "Hell, I am not going to do that." The other sailors wouldn't either. So I laughed and did it myself for the five of us. We lay there in the trench for quite a while until the barrage was over.

Shortly after that the troops had gone in and started bringing back prisoners. Many of them had just given up. They were in units in the German army that had been mostly work battalions. We were sitting there on the beach having a fine time getting suntans. Finally, the regular German soldiers started coming in and they were all holding up their pants. We found out as they were passed through the front line troops down to the rear, the troops started taking souvenirs. The Germans lost their buttons, insignias on their uniforms and their belt buckles by the time they got to the beach.

Subsequent to that my ship was sent to the Pacific. We hit the beach with the Marines at Iwo Jima. I was in the 6th wave there. The first four waves got in and had very heavy opposition. They were pinned down on the beach and we were held up for a couple hours. It was a mess. By the time we did get in there were wounded which we picked up. The hospital ship was just off-shore.

I was still there when the troops reached the top of Mt. Suribachi and remember the excitement on the boats when we first saw the US flag flying on top.

I was also in the invasion of Okinawa, and my most vivid memory is doing smoke boat duty around the ships with the kamikaze planes coming down at us.

I was in what the press carried as the last naval engagement of World War II. One day, three months after the war ended, we were half way between the Philippines and New Guinea when our watch noted a drifting boat or barge. As this was a danger to navigation, the captain sent a boat out to sink it. Our boat got alongside, and all of a sudden we saw the crew jump into the water and swim away as a grenade went off in our boat. There were two Japanese in the drifting boat, presumably from one of the islands where they

Library of Congress

had been abandoned and who didn't know the war was over. Another boat was able to pick up our men. The Japanese started shooting at us with a rifle so there they were on this little makeshift boat doing battle with this large looming ship. Finally our captain had had enough of it and turned our guns on them and sank them. I went out to recover our boat which was badly hit by our shells. We saw a Japanese body but when we got near it a large shark, fin out of the water, swam up, turned and took it down under not ten feet from us. Sharks followed us all the way to our ship.

These war stories could go on and on.

Q: I know, I just wanted to give a feel.

MORIN: After the war I returned to the University of New Hampshire for a couple of years. I had married during the war and our daughter was born shortly after. I looked around and decided that after the excitement of the war years, settling down in New Hampshire would never satisfy me so I checked around and decided on the Foreign Service. Actually I went to Washington with the ECA in mind.

Q: That was the Marshall Plan.

MORIN: Yes. Senator Bridges got me an interview with John Peurifoy who said State would be better and took me on as a staff vice consul. A month later, in August 1948, I started the basic officers' course.

My career has been very satisfactory. I think I accomplished things. I got what I wanted out of it so I have no regrets.

I have been in the Foreign Service and in State for 44 years now.

Q: Your first assignment was to Algiers. Was that right?

MORIN: Yes.

Library of Congress

Q: From 1948-50?

MORIN: Yes. I might introduce that by saying that at the commencement exercise we had before we graduated from the basic officers course, General Marshall, who was then Secretary of State, was the speaker. He also gave out the diplomas. As I went through the line, he shook my hand, gave me my diploma, and said, "Son, where are you going?" I said, "I've been assigned to Algiers, sir." And he said, "Algiers hey, that's the St. George Hotel. Good luck to you." Well it was for me because I ended up living there. The St. George had been the headquarters for the American military in North Africa...Eisenhower's headquarters, etc.

I must say it was a fancy hotel but difficult because we were quite poor in those days. We didn't have many of the allowances that you have now. We had a little girl at that time and we couldn't go downtown for supper because it was too late for her, but we couldn't afford to eat in the dining hall at the St. George, as it was just too expensive for us. But we developed a scheme. We would order room service and the waiter would come up, bring in his table (we had a suite), and lay out the linens, plates, etc. and then he would ask, "Madam are you going to have the soup tonight." We always ordered the menu fixe, just one meal every night for the two of us. That was all we could afford. And the waiter would dish it out, very formally, one course to Ann and the next to me.

We found Algiers was a real colony in those days. This was a complete French society on the backs of the native population. The French had everything. It was not like in many of the other colonies I have been to. The French had all the jobs all the way down. You found the garage mechanics, the waiters, the ushers, all those little jobs, were all taken over by French. The Algerians, themselves, had nothing but jobs as day laborers, maids, street car conductors, and taxi drivers. Everything else was French.

I found that my first few days confirmed my expectations that I was getting into an interesting kind of life. We hadn't been there more than three or four days when we were

Library of Congress

invited to a big gala. The whole consular corps was going to this theater. I was told to go, get myself a tux and get your wife dressed up. Off we went in a consulate car. The theater was lit up like a Hollywood premier. The Spahis, mounted Algerian troops in colorful uniforms, were there. We got out of the car onto a red carpet which went up into the theater. The theater had sweeping stairways like an opera house. On the way out it was the same way. Your car was called by loudspeaker. Algiers in those days was great for photographs of officialdom and flash bulbs were flashing everywhere.

The next weekend or so, the political officer, George Bogardus, who was a red head, called me in and asked if I would go down to a nationalist party meeting at a theater across town and observe what was happening. He couldn't go, he would be too conspicuous. He thought maybe I would be dark enough not to stand out. Thinking of every spy movie I had ever seen, I put on a nondescript suit, didn't shave that day, and hopped on a street car and went down to Bab el Oued, a workers quarter on the other side of the Casbah from the St. George. I was a little early and walked around observing people trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. Finally to use up time, I went to a bar. There was a pinball machine by the window, and I started playing it looking out all the time waiting for the meeting to start. While looking out whom do I see walking by, looking very nondescript, slinking along trying to be inconspicuous, but the British vice consul!

My first early experiences sort of bore out the feeling that I was really into something.

Q: I can't remember the exact time when the situation turned around, but were you there then?

MORIN: No, that was later. I was there during the middle period, a lull. There had been a very bad situation there in Setif in 1945 on VE Day when the French bombed a demonstration that seemed to be getting out of hand and killed anywhere, depending on whom you read, from 10 to 40 thousand people. The Algerians were very quiet in the period I was there, 1948-50. There were two major opposition movements but they

Library of Congress

were not terrorists but just held meetings. In fact those two movements, later on during the rebellion were considered rather friendly compared to the FLN. But at that time the French were very suspicious of it all, and they were suspicious of us, the US government. They had the idea that we were pushing this. The story in Algiers was that Roosevelt at the summit meeting at the Hotel Anfa in Casablanca had obtained a promise that Algeria would be given to the States. This was completely nonsense, but that is what people thought. The French were most unhappy with the thought that we were sympathetic to the natives and feared we might be doing something for them. For instance, our phones were tapped by our great allies by using equipment left behind by the US Army.

I attended Arab movies occasionally, and one day the consul general called a couple of us in and said, "Cut it out. We're getting complaints from the government about you guys showing up in Arab movie theaters."

I remember my local secretary was approached...some young fellow made up to her at a dance, and she got to like him. After a time he said, "Look, why don't you tell us what's is going on at the consulate." She said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Oh, nothing much. Just who does what, what do they talk about and so forth?" She said, "Oh, I wouldn't do that." He got very pushy and proved to be an agent, a *deuxième* bureau agent.

*Q: The *deuxième* bureau is their intelligence.*

MORIN: So he said, "If you don't cooperate with us you won't get your passport. We know you have an application to go to Italy on a trip this summer, and you are not going to get it." And she didn't get it either.

Q: At the time the French authorities really looked with great suspicion on our consular establishment?

Library of Congress

MORIN: Oh, yes, very much so. We were blasted in the Paris papers. I remember one period when there were headlines in the French press...the tabloids...saying “the American consulate at Algiers is promoting the nationalist movement.”

Our political officer got caught in the middle of this. He had asked for permission to talk to one of the opposition leaders. The French government reluctantly gave him permission to go meet with these people, but they almost PNGed him at the same time.

Our consul general, who was a southern gentleman of the old school, was the last person to be promoting [laughter] the rights of the “natives”, but he was, in effect, eased out because of French unhappiness with him.

Q: You were in Algiers from 1948-1950.

MORIN: I think I left on the last day of the year. We had a son born in Algiers who developed an inguinal hernia at six weeks. The French doctor had him trussed up and said he would eventually need an operation. On the way home on a American passenger ship, the ship's doctor took one look at him and said he shouldn't be permitted to move around and must be operated on immediately upon arrival in the States. Well, he was operated on, but he died on the operating table. It was his first birthday. We were, of course, shattered.

With that, there was no question of returning to Algiers, and the Department sent me to Le Havre, France, where I was economic officer. Le Havre was a small consulate, there were four Americans. It was basically a maritime post. We had ships coming in all the time, seaman hanging around the office, American tourists stranded there, that sort of thing. Our lives revolved around the ships. Although I wasn't suppose to be the consular officer, we all were. I spent time at the jails, hospitals, etc.

One of the most demanding jobs was the meeting and greeting of the big liners. That was before American officials were required to travel on American flagships and before

Library of Congress

people used planes to any extent. So every ship that came into Le Havre had somebody on board. We had all the Cunard ships, the French liners, the American liners, and the Dutch liners. Invariably there would be somebody on board we had to meet. Our job was to go aboard, find them, tell where they were to be housed in Paris, pass on messages, help them get their cars off, get through customs, etc. You would have the sort of problem where an army family would have adopted a German baby, gone home and come back without a visa for France for the kid...visas were not required for Americans but were required for Germans. You got into that sort of problem.

Often these ships got in early in the morning so often we had to be there at 6 in the morning. We would sit behind the custom lines and watch for diplomatic and official passports and nail the people afterwards. But we didn't have a sign saying "American Consulate," that would have been lethal. Every tourist on the ship would have been after us.

Everybody went by ship in those days. I remember meeting Mrs. Roosevelt, Philip Jessup, Perle Mesta, and all kinds of people coming through. As another example of the kind of problems you get into, a young lady was coming in. Her husband, a military officer, was to meet her. He had sent a message to us saying to tell his wife that he was on maneuvers and she would have to drive across all of France and half of Germany by herself. I told her that and she nearly passed out. She said she didn't even know what side of the road they drove on. Well, I found somebody, some other army type, who was going out that way and he agreed to lead her all the way across to where she was going.

And the seamen, of course, were a horrible problem. In those days American flag ships were running from the Persian Gulf to Le Havre to deliver oil to the refineries in Le Havre. It was an 18-month hitch for these sailors. It was terrible because the ships would turn around in Le Havre in 24 hours. In Saudi Arabia, the Saudis would not let them ashore. So they were caught on the ship for 18 months, and they had all these problems. As a ship started coming near we would get a notice that there were so many people on board who

Library of Congress

were sick. A doctor was needed to examine them to make sure they were sick and not just trying to get out of their contracts. Some of them would skip ship and go to Paris and live on their pay for a month or two and then come back trying to get a job. This created all sorts of problems. In France if you break a seamen's contract you can go to jail. They don't mess around. We favored the seamen by saying that the shipping agent was responsible for them even though they had deserted their ship for extended periods.

Not only did we help people coming into France, we also helped people leaving France. We would have the hitchhikers, the destitute, the American tourists, seamen, etc. Le Havre was the nearest port to the US so they would all gravitate down to that point thinking they could get some job on the ships. Well, that is not allowed anymore, the unions put a stop to it. In the pre-war days that was the way our Foreign Service people used to get across as the government didn't pay passage for home leave.

One day I had a call from a woman who said that she and her friend were running out of money and didn't know what to do and wanted to come to see us. My boss, the consul, Sabin J. Dalferes, was a Cajun, an old FSS consul from World War I, a real colorful character from Lafayette, Louisiana. He and I received these two women and it was pretty obvious to me when I took a look at them that they were lesbians...one was very butchy in her dress and the other was very feminine.

They started talking. The very female one had had a job in Germany with the US Army. When her friend showed up the Army fired her on the spot. They were now running out of money. Their families would have very little to do with them. The family of the feminine one offered to give her a one way ticket but nothing else. They were just really hard up. They didn't know what to do. They were in Le Havre and broke.

Then they started telling us she had lost her job because the Army thought they were lesbians. Dalferes got very uncomfortable with this and asked if this had something to do with the Well of Loneliness.

Library of Congress

Q: The Well of Loneliness was a novel in the 1930's which treated lesbianism in a very discreet way.

MORIN: The more masculine one got up and said, "Absolutely not, I am not a lesbian, I'm a hermaphrodite" She paused, "Do you want me to prove it?" She started undoing her clothes and Dalferes almost fell out of his chair. "Oh no, no," he said. She continued, "Now look, I'm in love with this woman. She is the only person in my whole life who has ever given me the time of day. I am not going to be separated from her. We need help."

Both of us were very sympathetic to them. We managed to find them very cheap lodgings in Le Havre, and later I found out that Dalferes had paid for them. Eventually we made arrangements with US Lines to give them passage with the one ticket the family would pay for. We went aboard ship and saw them off. Dalferes gave them some pocket money.

About three or four months later we get a letter from the masculine one which said, "I have been operated on and now we are married. I want you, Mr. Dalferes and your junior consul, to know that you were the only people who ever were nice to us and we really appreciated it. We can't give you enough of our thanks."

Anyway, that was the kind of work I did in Le Havre. I was there for a while and then the Department decided to change the consular district and transfer the northern departments of France to Paris. I then went to Paris with them.

Q: You served in Paris from 1952 to 1954.

MORIN: Right. My wife was quite ill. Those times we didn't have much in the way of support from the Department, no medical support for dependents, no education allowances. My wife fell ill and had a very difficult pregnancy in Le Havre, and I had to send her home at my own expense. By the time she got back six months later with the baby, son Lee, I was in Paris.

Library of Congress

Q: You had two Ambassadors while you were in Paris. James Dunn, who was one of the old hands of the Foreign Service and Douglas Dillon who was more of a contemporary figure. Did you have any contact or observe how they operated and managed?

MORIN: No, I never saw them. This was such a huge operation in Paris. I didn't know the Ambassadors. Everybody was invited once to the DCM's house. That was about the extent of that kind of activity for my level.

Q: What were you doing in Paris?

MORIN: I was in the economic section. I started off with straight economic reporting. That was not a very well run operation. I wasn't very happy there...nor were a lot of other people. It was large and our boss, who was a fine reporter on his own, just didn't administer anything. He did all the work, working until 7 or 8 every night. But there was no feedback, instructions or anything.

After a time I was transferred to the commercial section. I was the assistant commercial attach# and I enjoyed that a great deal. It was a very nice operation with a wonderful boss, Patton Allen. Among other things, I was the one who received all the visitors that no one knew what to do with. When the receptionist at the main lobby would get a nut of some kind they would be sent to the commercial section. But it was a fine job and I enjoyed it. Paris was terribly expensive for us in addition to my wife's trip to the States and coming back at my own expense. For instance, at the Embassy commissary you could only buy things on account...you couldn't use cash... that was to control things. If you didn't settle your bill at the end of the month, you were red-lined and then you couldn't buy anything else there. This was a very common occurrence for me...not being able to settle at the end of the month. So we ended up buying on the local market a lot more than we needed to if we had had more capital.

Library of Congress

For instance, coal was a real problem. We had a coal burning furnace in our house. Coal on the open market was sold by the five kilo bag which worked out to over a \$100 a ton. You could buy coal for \$50 a ton from the Embassy if you bought two tons at a time. I was never able to put \$100 together.

Also, we were obliged at a great disadvantage to buy our francs at the official rate of 350 to the dollar while the black market rate was over 500. The embassy was very strict about this, although the military and others accommodated their people.

Q: What you are saying here is something that I empathize with completely because I went through it too. Americans in certain places were living very splendidly but in other places they really were hurting. The gay diplomatic life was not that fancy when you were trying to support yourself. This really inhibited our ability to get around.

MORIN: Exactly, and in Paris particularly where you had such a large operation, so much brass and high level officers...that upper class in the Embassy was a world by itself. We had very little contact with it in the ranks. It was like being in the Department, there were so many people. Also that was a very trying time in the Foreign Service anyway. This was during the McCarthy years and while that affected the senior officers more than it did us, we still felt it. We had the visit of Cohn and Schine coming through Paris.

Q: These were two aides of Senator McCarthy who made, in diplomatic terms, absolute horses asses out of themselves by running around looking at what they considered subversive books. These were two young kids with lots of ego and no intelligence.

MORIN: Right. And they were made the laughing stock because all of their stories were picked up in the press all the time.

It was also the time of the RIF, the reduction in force of the Eisenhower administration. That affected the FSS officers of which I was still one then. Notices would come out periodically, listing the names of people who would be dropped. You had three weeks to

Library of Congress

get home if you wanted to get your way paid! Of course this news would come into the communications center and the secretaries down there would pass the word around. You had this going on all the time, people on edge not knowing what they were going to do if they got fired, which was what it was. So it was a very trying time for most of us.

But being in Paris, itself, was such a delight to me so I was able to enjoy it, but the Embassy was not that great a place to be in. It was a horrible place for secretaries, for instance. Because as the girls told me, "It is fine to go to museums for a while, but after that what do we do the rest of the time?" The American males all went out with French girls. The American girls were left on their own and unless they were real extroverts, of which there were a few, they just didn't get around much. It got to be terrible for them; lots of tears.

Q: Although you were somewhat removed, did you get a feeling of how the Embassy was responding to the Vietnam situation?

MORIN: This was 1952-54. Vietnam was just barely starting.

Q: I am talking about the French side.

MORIN: The French were having their problems. We had a desk for Vietnam...for those three countries. So it was a concern to people and the Dien Bien Phu battle was during that period.

Q: Yes, that was in 1954.

MORIN: The thing that struck me about that was the French soldiers coming back from that area and from Korea earlier, would not be well received by the French population. I used to say to myself, "Well, that is just terrible, Americans would never react that way." And of course they acted the same way when our own soldiers came back from Vietnam. That used to shock me in those days.

Library of Congress

We had other things too. There was the Rosenberg trial. Remember that?

Q: Yes, Jules and Ethel Rosenberg were accused and convicted of spying for the Soviet Union on nuclear matters. They were executed.

MORIN: There were lots of protests. The Embassy would be ringed by these police vans. There were signs everywhere of "Americans Go Home" and that kind of stuff.

Then I was assigned to Kobe, Japan. There the treatment was absolutely different. We had complete support. We could use all the military commissaries, PXs, schools, etc. and nice houses were available.

In Paris, my daughter went to a French school, which was all right because she was fluent in French and accustomed to French schools in Algeria, but for kids who were older they couldn't fit in. In French schools one had difficulty if you didn't speak good French. The French system, as explained to us by French teachers, was to favor the upper 10 or 20% of the children and not bother with the rest. The American school in Paris was quite expensive, and since the government didn't pay for it, people at our level just couldn't afford to send kids there.

In Japan it was different. We had an affordable school and nice houses.

Q: You were there from 1954-56.

MORIN: Right. There, again, I was an economic officer. We had offices in two cities. The main office in those days was in Kobe, which is not the case anymore. We had a economic/commercial office in Osaka. I spent a day in each, back and forth. I lived on the railroad line between the two cities, so it was very convenient. It was a place where we really got into the guts of the economy. It was really something. Osaka, among other things, was a textile center. That was the time when the Japanese were starting to penetrate the American market on finished goods, textiles, etc. The American textile

Library of Congress

manufacturers were really unhappy. It was just beginning, but they could feel the pressure. They were trying to push protectionist measures while the Japanese were expanding their activities all the time, particularly in artificial fibers—spun rayons, etc. My boss was tremendously competent.

Q: Who was that?

MORIN: Lou Gleeck. He had learned so much about the textile business that some of these textile people would come to him for advice. I traveled with him and by myself around various factories. We had very good rapport with the industrial community.

Another thing that Osaka had...it is the sundries capital of the world. I made a whole series of reports on this. This is enamel ware, artificial funeral wreaths, toy cap guns, strings of beads, Christmas ornaments, fountain pens, cigarette lighters, beaded pocketbooks, toys, buttons and much more. *Q: Sort of the Woolworth type stuff.*

MORIN: Each of these items would have its own quarter. You would go along the narrow streets and see people working away in stalls and ramshackle structures making all these things. They were depending on the American market for most of their sales. They were also great in copying things for the black market in Europe; I remember buying exact duplicates of Parker pens and Ronson lighters for fifty cents. So I made a whole series of reports. It was fascinating.

We also had another interesting experience. In those days, borax, was considered a sensitive material that we were keeping away from China. It was used in some form of munitions. A lot of it was being sold to Japan for authentic purposes, but more was going into Japan than should have been. We had the job of tracking it down. I would go around to these enamelware makers. That is where they used a lot of it. I would ask to see their books and they would show me how much they bought and how much they used. They would get annoyed, and looking back on it, I don't blame them.

Library of Congress

The other thing that is very interesting to me is the contrast of the Japan in those days with the Japan of today. It is so different. I am amazed with stories of Japanese efficiency. It was so contrary to my day.

Q: I was there in 1952, 53.

MORIN: Where were you?

Q: I was in the air force at Johnson Air Field. An enlisted man.

MORIN: Were you down near Kobe?

Q: No it was a fighter field outside of Tokyo.

MORIN: Well. For instance the Bell helicopter plant. Bell was putting up a plant in Kobe and I used to know the people there pretty well. The manager said, "You know, we have to put three Japanese on these assembly lines where we usually would have one American."

I had a Hillman Minx, a little English car I had bought in France. In Japan at that time they were assembling Minxes in Tokyo, and it was a very popular car. The Hillman agent in Kobe told me, "I have so much trouble with these assembled Minxes because my people have to rebuild them here in Kobe. They leave out things like the sealer behind the windshield and things like that. It is just terrible. People much prefer to buy an English-made Minx." And sure enough, when it became time for me to leave he was after me to sell it to him. Here is a guy who had a whole warehouse full of new Minxes and he bought my five-year old Minx even though the steering wheel was on the wrong side for Japan. He said that he would fix it up and get a good price for it.

The whole idea of the Japanese being so efficient now is just mind-boggling to me. I could cite dozens of examples of inefficiency.

Library of Congress

I left Japan and went on to Yale and got an M.A. I spent a year at Yale.

Q: What were you taking?

MORIN: Economics.

Q: This was paid by the State Department?

MORIN: Yes. After Yale I went to INR.

Q: You were there from 1957-1960.

MORIN: Yes, I was in the African Branch of INR. I spent a couple of years there.

Q: A little feel about the African Branch in INR. I came to INR in 1960 dealing with Africa, but you were there before what might be called the discovery of Africa by the Department of State.

MORIN: Yes.

Q: During the Eisenhower years, before independence began popping out all over there. What was the interest and impression of Africa that you got while in INR?

MORIN: Well, I was pretty far down the line. We were in a branch under the near eastern division. You may recall that the geographic bureau, NEA, had divided up Africa into a couple of areas. There was a deputy assistant secretary for the northern half and a deputy assistant secretary for the southern half of Africa, and that was it. We had a post in Dakar which took care of virtually all of French Africa. There was a post in east Africa that was responsible for everything there. The only thing of importance from their point of view was South Africa. North Africa was still under EUR [the European Bureau].

Library of Congress

After a time things starting building up. I was there at the time the Africans were approaching independence during the “wind of change.” By 1960 the whole thing started turning around; you started getting new countries every other day. I had left by then, I was just on the beginning of it. I remember when the French got kicked out, or pulled out of Guinea. They had come up with idea of having a system of autonomous states but still under French jurisdiction. They thought that would sell, but it didn't sell to everyone. Sekou Toure of Guinea had his country voted out of it and the French left there in a huff. I had gone to a meeting in Paris about that...a Cycle d'Information, a study conference at the Colonial Office to which the French government had invited a number of countries to send people, and they gave us a sales pitch. I could see what the French were hoping to do, but they just didn't succeed. It lasted for a while. I must say they did better then some of the other colonial powers.

Q: Who were you feeding information to in the State Department? What were you looking at particularly?

MORIN: We had the standard INR studies. The Mau Mau had just finished in Kenya and there was a lot of interest in that. We had studies on that. North Africa was under EUR in those days, so we didn't get involved in that part of Africa. I just can't recall what the issues were at the time. But mainly it was that the new developing opposition movement in each of these countries was getting stronger, Ivory Coast, Togo, Cameroon and so forth, and we were reporting on that. I remember one paper I wrote with EUR, Eurafrique, on the relationship between France and its ex-colonies. It was pretty obvious to all but the colonial powers that the Africans were going to go their own way very soon.

Q: Were we concerned about the communists getting involved in Africa?

MORIN: Yes, there was much concern that the communists might be coming in. I used to lecture at FSI on communism in Africa. Actually there were very few communists except in Guinea, but many people were afraid they would take over completely if the colonial

Library of Congress

powers left. If there was any communist activity in Africa, all the bells would go off all over the Department and everywhere else. I remember in Somalia there was a Chinese traveler who was talking about backing some kind of repair shop. I reported it and must have overstated it because I started getting calls from CIA and all over the place wanting to know what was going on. Of course that was the time of the Chinese railroad...

Q: Yes, there was a railroad from Dar es Salaam into Northern Rhodesia.

MORIN: The Israelis were also involved in Africa. They were trying to build up positions so that they would have friends in that area.

Then INR got saddled with this horrible job of NIS reports.

Q: National Intelligence Surveys, which was sort of an encyclopedia on every country in the world. Kind of a make work job.

MORIN: Oh, it was terrible. It just seemed to be so unnecessary. In the first place by putting a lot of classified stuff in it, it had to be locked up in the communications room in an embassy. It wasn't something that you just pulled out of your bookcase and looked something up in.

Q: It just died.

MORIN: Yes, but I had to contribute to a lot of those. I did a long section on the economy of the Belgian Congo right before the break. I was told that suddenly people started reading it after the revolution because there wasn't anything else. That was the only thing I can say that came out of all those reports.

Q: When did you get into the FSO ranks?

Library of Congress

MORIN: I took the tests in Paris, the written exam. That was the old one, three and a half days. I passed it. I went home to take the oral but it was postponed and then canceled because of the Wriston program. So I actually got in when I was in Kobe.

Q: You left INR in 1960 and went to Baghdad for a good solid four year tour.

MORIN: Baghdad was very difficult living but very rewarding professionally. I must say it was a really active place with a lot going on. I spent very little time in the office. I was out in the community all the time calling on bankers, industrialists, government people, etc. I had a car and chauffeur that I used virtually all of the time.

Q: There had been this horrendous revolution in 1958 where the king was assassinated, and mobs took over...

MORIN: The Prime Minister and the Regent were dragged through the streets behind cars until their bodies wore out.

Q: So you got there two years after that. What was the political situation like?

MORIN: They had settled down from the revolution. They were getting closer to the Soviets who were moving in with five year plans for Iraq and financing industries and such. And yet the Soviets were not very popular at all. Iraq had quite a large size middle class, many of them trained in Europe, particularly in England, or in the States, and these were the technicians and junior people in the various ministries. They were very friendly to us, although officially they were not. Nevertheless we got around a lot despite this, and were able to help them a lot. The Soviets had begun to plan a steel mill in Baghdad for the Iraqis. A senior official, who trained at the University of Michigan, asked one of us, "Look, I need some help. We have been given these new plans for this steel mill and it is terribly outdated. It has stuff you haven't seen in the United States for years. This is what they are offering to put up and the top brass want to do it. I wonder if you could help?" We made contact with one of the big American steel companies, through the Department,

Library of Congress

of course, and asked if there was anything that could be done. The company sent one of their vice presidents, who was going to be out that way anyway. The idea was to say that he just happened to be going by the area and dropped in to see if by chance there was any business he could get. I took him around to the government, and he explained their latest systems. They were just putting in a new plant in Ontario in those days. He explained that this was the newest thing and what they should be thinking about it. I took him into the minister, himself, and he explained what the situation was and gave the pitch to the minister. Well it had the effect of slowing this down for about two years because these guys started having second thoughts and went over the plans again. But at some point Qasim said, "Let's go with it anyway."

Q: Qasim was still the head of the junta?

MORIN: Yes, he was the military dictator. His picture was everywhere, just like Saddam now. But looking back, he was much better than the current crowd.

Q: We are talking right now about Saddam Hussein who is probably the worst of the dictators...

MORIN: There were three coups during the time I was in Baghdad. The bloodiest one was the one that upset Qasim in 1963. It was quite scary for us because we could hear the radio...the Qasim side was trying to raise the people who lived in the slums, the sarifa dwellers, to rise up against the middle class and against the foreigners. These slums were just over the bund from our house. So it looked pretty bad there for a while.

But finally the new group won and that night word was passed around the city that everybody should watch television at 7:00. At 7:00 a "Felix The Cat" cartoon played for a few minutes. Then all of a sudden the scene shifted to the TV studio and there they had Qasim's body on display. They had shot him and his lieutenants right there. They held up the head and rotated the body so one could be sure he was dead. They didn't want stories

Library of Congress

that he was hiding up in the mountains planning a counter-coup. All his lieutenants were there too, all dead and sprawled around. That was the evening entertainment.

Actually it wasn't as bad as the 1958 revolution when the two leaders were dragged behind the cars all around the city for a couple of days for the same effect...to show that they were dead.

Anyway, Qasim was gone and the new guys came in. It was interesting. These fellows were Baathis. We had some information on the Baath party. Most of them were young idealists, some from the London School of Economics, but a lot of them were military types. So you had two groups within the Baath party. They were terribly young. The head of the labor ministry was 19 or 20. The new foreign minister, just a kid, walked into the ministry and when stopped by the guard and asked who the hell he thought he was, said that he was the new foreign minister...so the story goes.

The Embassy was well plugged in to what was going on, and it was suggested some time before the revolution that I cultivate one of the senior officers at the refinery which I did. "Comes the Revolution" and behold he was the new minister of oil as our people had expected.

The new team started up the government. It got kind of nasty though. There was a great deal of torture and that kind of thing. Things were very much on edge. My contacts in the banking community were leaving town if they weren't in prison. Then after a while, the end of the same year, the other element of the Baath party, the Saddam types, just threw out these young kids and shot them. There was a lot of street fighting in our neighborhood between the Army and the Baathi para-military units. I remember my son playing football on the street, and when a shot or a grenade would go off nearby, all the kids would jump over the walls and then, after a while, would come back out and play some more.

The Baath party stayed a different creature from then on.

Library of Congress

Q: During most of this time our Ambassador was John Jernegan?

MORIN: Yes, he was the Ambassador for half of the time. His problem was...Kuwait was given its independence by the British. The Ambassador from Kuwait landed in Washington, and the moment he presented his credentials, Iraq PNGed Jack Jernegan because they wouldn't accept this. They claimed Kuwait was part of their country. They had a huge map of Kuwait on the side of a high building in Baghdad showing it as part of Iraq. They issued postage stamps with Kuwait as part of Iraq. The funniest thing of all, they sent monthly payments to the Emir of Kuwait, his pay for being a district governor.

The Iraqi army started down and got to the border and we were all reporting on this. But the British sent their troops back into Kuwait and that stopped it. But the Iraqis have always had this claim to Kuwait. The countries are very close in dialect and customs.

Q: What was our attitude toward Iraq at the time?

MORIN: We were hoping to develop it as a friendly country. Iraq is such a promising country. It has such potential. Here is a country in the middle of the desert which should be the most prosperous in that part of the world. It has lots of oil, probably as much as Saudi Arabia. It has water...two major rivers. It has no population crush and a lot of real smart people. There is much unused agricultural land...all you had to do was put water in the deserts around Baghdad and everything grows. It could be like California.

Q: I remember that was very much the feeling at the time that here was a place that really was ready to blossom forth in every way, and yet...

MORIN: Yes. And they just can't hack it. They have one big political problem of their own making. The Arabs that run Iraq have this problem with the Kurds. The Kurds form maybe 20 percent of the population and they are not Arabs. But the name of the country is Arab Republic of Iraq, and the government always plays up the Arab side. They're not ready to accommodate the Kurds. This has been a continuing war. It had been going on for a while

Library of Congress

when I was there. There were some horrible stories. I was up north once and saw some of the devastation where the Iraqi army would blast out villages and that kind of thing. Or they would move whole villages down south to try to mix them up with the people in the south. It was a continuing thing that goes on today. It may never be resolved. It's unfortunate as it keeps the country from stabilizing and developing properly.

Q: How did we feel about Iraq and the Soviet Union?

MORIN: We didn't like the idea that the Soviets were getting in there. We thought the Soviets would get into the Gulf that way so our overall strategy was to try to head this off. One strategy was to try to make friends with Iraq and we did. We were friendly with them and helped them as much as we could. We wouldn't give them any military products but we were beginning to give things like trucks and that sort of stuff. We had had a huge AID program up until 1958, but that was cut way back. But we had a small one during the time I was there. We were trying to keep the door open to Iraq and hoping they would come around and show some sense. If they had, they could be a major country in that part of the world, the major country. It was an unfortunate development. They still have the potential.

Q: Were our close ties to Israeli a burr under the saddle?

MORIN: It was a problem, but much less of one than you might think. You would hear about; it was a subject that would come up occasionally. It bothered them. There was lots of censorship. You couldn't bring anything into Baghdad or Iraq that showed the name Israel on it in those days. Even things like atlases and maps would be blacked out.

Q: I was in Saudi Arabia about the same time and we had the same thing.

MORIN: I remember Newsweek and Time would come in on the British Airways plane. In order to get them in, the BA people would cut out the pages that had anything to do with Israel. People, of course, listened to international news, BBC, and even the Israeli stations.

Library of Congress

Q: Did you find yourself in competition with the British?

MORIN: To some extent. We were selling planes in those days and we had competition for Iraqi Airways...we wanted to sell Boeings to them. The British thought they should get some of that pie and they worked hard on it. We outdid them. The British accused us at one time of playing dirty pool...the military attach#s got involved in it somehow.

The French weren't in at the time as they didn't have diplomatic relations with Iraq because of selling arms to Israel. In fact nothing French could come in so whenever you bought Courvoisier or something like that it would be labeled Lebanese brandy.

I remember one case, an American called from the frontier, which was quite a ways. He said that they wouldn't let him cross, he wanted to go to Iran. He had a Citroen, a French car, and they wouldn't let him in.

That turned around while I was there. The French embassy reopened, and they started getting into the act too.

We had a couple more coups in Baghdad. Later in the year when I mentioned earlier that the Baath party turned over, it was the time of President Kennedy's assassination. It was also the time that Duke Ellington was in Baghdad for a USIA program and was caught there for a week. Immediately before that we had had the annual Marine Ball, and Duke Ellington was the band that played for us. That was probably tops for a Marine ball. But Duke Ellington was most unhappy about being caught in Baghdad as were a lot of other people.

Q: Were you scared during these coups because a couple of Americans were dragged out of a hotel...

MORIN: That was in 1958.

Library of Congress

Q: Yes, but obviously that left an impression because Iraqi crowds...

MORIN: The Iraqi crowds were terrible and the fighting was around us during the first coup particularly. Planes were strafing the Presidential Palace which was right next door to the Embassy. We weren't in our house but the house boy was and he called frantically and said, "Say the house has just been hit by a bomb. Is it all right if I go outside?" He was supposed to be guarding the house, but he felt safer outside.

Then an interesting thing. In the second coup my daughter was teaching (she was a teenager) a kindergarten class across town. The rebellion broke out so people sent the bus to pick up everybody. It picked up the children, and, while she was locking up, the bus went off without her. She didn't know what to do. She finally found a cab but it couldn't get through the barriers. The driver took her to a village below Baghdad. It was a scary situation. We didn't know anything about this, of course. She spent several hours with a family in a hut there. After time the driver found a boat and rowed her across the river, which is quite a row, down below the city and then walked her back to an area that she knew. She popped into Bill Lakeland's house. We didn't know she was missing as I presumed she was with one of the mothers from the kindergarten. This could have been a real tragedy as she could have easily disappeared for good. We are forever thankful to that unknown taxi driver.

I was the chief warden during these coups which means the guy that takes over the central communications office and keeps tabs on private Americans around town, sort of like an operations center. We had a boat for pleasure on the Tigris and a couple of Marines went out in the boat and crossed the river to see what was going on. The militia started after them and shot up the boat. Fortunately they got back and reported to me. I was most unhappy. It could have been very serious, as they could easily have been killed. It was quite a sight to go up on your roof and see the planes zoom in across the river, shooting

Library of Congress

up the main streets and the ministries. You could hear the tanks rumbling at night and that kind of stuff.

One of the best things about Baghdad from my point of view was that you could go out into the desert and visit the archeological sites. There are thousands of sites, mostly unexplored, some dating back to 3000 BC or even older. We'd go out in our cars steering across the absolutely flat and hard-packed desert by compass. It was like a boat on a brown sea. The sites would pop up like islands as you approached. I loved it and still miss it.

Q: You left Baghdad and came back to the Department where you worked in the Economic Bureau from 1964-65. I have you in the Maritime Division.

MORIN: Yes, I had forgotten about that. I don't have it on my list.

Q: What were you doing there?

MORIN: Let's see. One of the things I used to do was the Ice Patrol work. We have an international treaty which provides for following icebergs as they peel off the glaciers in Greenland and float south. The US is responsible for operations, and the Coast Guard does the patrolling. We get their costs and divide it up among the 75 or so countries and send out the bills. Each bill requires a Foreign Office Note type of thing. There's always some haggling over how much each country should pay as costs are based on how often their ships crossed the affected zones.

Another job was IMCO, which is the international maritime organization which promotes maritime safety. It was setup at the time of the Titanic...safety at sea and that sort of thing. We have representation on IMCO in London, and we were the backup in the Department.

Then we would follow the problems of the shipping conferences. The cargo ships that are on a regular schedule are members of groups that are in effect monopolies whereby

Library of Congress

shipping rates are fixed by the conferences and the companies are supposed to live up to these. They are excused from American anti-trust laws for that purpose.

Well, as you would know, the one offender in all this was the Japanese. They would always be undercutting and making special deals for their ships. Americans would quote a price, and the Japanese would still get the business it even though everyone was supposed to be quoting the same. Also, the Japanese firms always favored the Japanese lines.

The Latin American Free Trade Association was a real problem for our ships. We had a couple of lines...Grace Line and one or two others...that went around Latin America. They were discriminated against by the local governments.

We were involved in the Indian-Pakistan war because of the freight rates...again the technical problems that develop from a war time situation. Sometimes there were serious port problems. Congestion at Colombo often was a bad problem, for example.

I had an interesting problem at Port au Prince, Haiti. An Arab, named Fayid, who had moved there and become a favorite of Papa Doc Duvalier, had been given control of the port of Port au Prince. The whole thing. Anyway our shipping lines found that they were being held up by him on port charges, agents' fees, docking privileges and the like. That got to be an issue. It was resolved when Fayid had a falling-out with Papa Doc and fled for his life.

Q: Then you went into the African Bureau. What were you dealing with?

MORIN: I was the alternate country director for Central West Africa which included those Francophone states in the middle of the continent starting with Gabon and all the way over to Cote d'Ivoire. The bureau isn't divided that way anymore. I enjoyed being in African Affairs. I was liaison officer with AID and was exchanging information with them all the time. I also handled at that time a double-taxation treaty with the Cameroon.

Library of Congress

Then I took a wonderful swing through Africa for two months or more. It was the only time that I've ever had orders permitting me to charter a plane. That was great. I went all over the place. From Libreville, Gabon, I chartered a plane and flew to Lambaréné which is Dr. Schweitzer's clinic. He was dead by then, but I called on his daughter and went through the whole clinic and walked around carrying a baby gorilla. I remember coming into the airport at Lambaréné...it was a one man show. The plane landed and we had to walk some distance to the river and then hire a canoe to get across to the clinic.

Bethlehem Steel in those days had discovered this fabulous iron ore lode way up in northern Gabon and the Gabonese government wanted us to finance a railroad up to this lode. It was just a fantastic deposit. I went up to look at it. I don't know if you know much about iron, but the ore was about 70% iron, which means it is almost pure from the point of view of working with it. It was granulated, you could scoop up handfuls of it. The Bethlehem steel man who took me up said the mountains were just full of it. But it was so far from the coast and too expensive to exploit. He thought it would be something that would be developed in the future.

Anyway we went up by plane, flew over the mining site where there were just a few people. The plane made a lot of noise and attracted their attention. Then we went down to a little clearing in the jungle. The plane left us and we waited for about a hour until finally a truck appeared and picked us up and took us up to the mining camp. I went through the mine with my host. Early next morning he took me gorilla hunting up in the mountains. We found a lot of nests but didn't see any live ones. Anyway it was very exciting being way up in the jungle where the long hanging vines reminded me of Tarzan. I tried swinging on them, and you really could go quite a ways up with them.

The next day on the way home instead of taking a plane we went in a very large dugout canoe with a motor on it for a five hour ride down this river, the Ogoué, a huge river with the jungle hanging over it. Saw no people...Gabon has no population to speak of. We

Library of Congress

went all the way down to the first frontier town where the plane picked us up. It was a real enjoyable time.

Q: Had you noticed a change in attitude towards these countries in the Department...?

MORIN: Oh, yes. This was 1967. The Department had become interested in Africa after 1960. The change was the fact that these countries had become independent and were now members of the UN. Instead of being internal problems of Belgium or France or other, they were now international issues. Our AID programs grew. We had differences with France over the questions of the Central African countries; you see they were still under the French monetary structure so that was a disadvantage from our trading point of view. The new countries had great expectations and thought they would be better off independent, but that wasn't to be.

Then I was next assigned as DCM to Chad, but my wife couldn't pass the physical so I didn't go. I went back to Algiers instead. There I found a tremendous contrast to what it had been. Here it was a complete Algerian society where it had been completely French before.

Q: You were there from 1967-70. What was your job?

MORIN: I was economic officer, but also the number two there. We were small and limited by the Algerians. We were a section of the Swiss Embassy.

Q: This was because of the 1967 war with Israel.

MORIN: Yes, most of the Arab states broke relations with us then.

We were assigned to the Swiss Embassy. We had a limited number of people. I think it was 5 or 6 officers. So we all did everything. The Swiss flag flew over our Embassy. We had letters of protection from the Swiss Ambassador pasted on our houses. When we had any formal contacts with the Algerian government, diplomatic notes, etc., they all had to be

Library of Congress

done by or through the Swiss Ambassador. The Swiss charged us for everything. This kind of service was very expensive.

So we had to go down and brief the Swiss Ambassador about problems. Once in a while our position was in conflict with his. For example, we had a plane that came down in the middle of the Sahara. It was American-owned, Swiss chartered, running guns to Biafra. There were problems over who controlled the plane and who was responsible for the jailed crew. Anyway, he represented our side but had his own interests.

I hadn't been there very long when the three of us, the boss, Lew Hoffacker; Fred Galanto, the political officer, and myself met with the Foreign Office people for the first time after the 1967 break. It was at one of their homes, a private home. We slipped in and talked to them about where do we go from here. It grew from then on. We never went to top official functions, but we had many contacts lower down.

Q: What was your impression of the Algerian government at the time?

MORIN: At that time they had been flirting with the Soviets, but they didn't have much use for them. They were looking to us more and more all the time for high technology. The Soviet programs were irrigation ditches and such. The Soviets and the Romanians had both given assistance with oil drilling equipment and wells. Interestingly enough, the Soviet well drillers would take so many hours to go down so many feet. The Romanians could better them by about 10% or so and we bettered them by about 100%. Some of our stuff was so much superior that the Algerian didn't mess around with the Soviet stuff if they could avoid it.

Then they had contracts during my time, with El Paso for natural gas development. We sold them Boeings which was quite an achievement. There was a chemical factory that was going to be built. This was all at the beginning of the period after 1967 when they were coming back to the Americans for technology. Eventually after a few years they did renew relations with us. But we had three governments that were without diplomatic

Library of Congress

relations...the Germans, British and ourselves all had Swiss flags. So everywhere you went around the city you saw these Swiss flags.

One day I got a call from the Foreign Office. The protocol chief said that their UN ambassador was on his honeymoon somewhere down on an island near Florida, and he was hit by a wave and knocked unconscious and was in a permanent coma. They wanted our help in getting him back. I said I would look into it. I got a hold of Washington and we engineered an arrangement where an American medical plane that was returning to Germany would come by Algeria and drop him off on the way. So it did. They brought his wife and all their belongings as well.

So the plane is coming into the Algiers airport and the whole upper crust of the Foreign Office, who are all his friends, including the Chief of Protocol, are there. I am there watching the plane come in. A big magnificent C-130 with the first American markings seen in Algiers since the 1967 war. A couple of crewmen jump out and scurry around. I called up and asked the captain if he would come down. Sure, he would come down. All these Algerians are watching. Down he comes, a big, black impressive guy who looked like General Powell.

I should have introduced this by saying that the Algerians are very racist. They were stunned to see a black man in a position of authority, this just didn't happen in Algeria.

I knew the diplomats at the African embassies. They used to tell me stories about being discriminated against all the time. Buses would pull away without them, they'd be turned away at night clubs, and that sort of thing. Algeria is actually 10% black because the black/white line crosses the middle of the Sahara, but the blacks are way down the totem pole.

A large crowd had gathered by this time. The crew was in effect given the keys to the city but they didn't have time to stay for anything except for lunch. But as they left there was a large crowd of people...from government and elsewhere. The plane started off, and as you

Library of Congress

know those planes are built for short fields and get airborne very quickly. I could hear the gasps around me as this fantastic machine took off.

At the same time Algeria was trying to make friends with the rest of Africa or show its strength, or something. They hosted one of those Pan-African Congresses in Algiers. We got very much involved in that. The city was full of reporters and all that. One interesting thing was that American blacks were invited as Africans. There were two groups, the Eldridge Cleaver group and the Stokely Carmichael group which were opponents. They put one group in the St. George and the other in the Aletti downtown to keep them apart.

I was down in a store one day and heard American voices around the corner and went over to them. There were three black girls, young. I talked to them and told them who I was. I was Charg# at that time. They said, "Oh, maybe you can help us." I said, "Sure." They said that Eldridge and his group wanted to have a place where they could meet and could I help them. I said, "Sure, I'll give you a meeting room up at the Embassy. You can use the theater if you want." (This was an outlying structure across the road.) They said that would be wonderful. I said that I would send my vice-consul, Conrad Drescher, a young hippie type, down to talk with them.

He went down to see them and reported back, "Gee, the girls were all for it, but these guys turned their backs when I walked in." The girls said that they had talked it over and it wouldn't be appropriate for them to meet at the Embassy. I never thought they would come when I made the offer.

Q: For the record, both these groups, Carmichael and Cleaver, at that time were considered militant blacks who were taking the line of the 1960s against the United States as an imperialist power.

MORIN: Some of them were refugees from justice. A couple of them had hijacked a plane to get to Cuba. They disliked Cuba. They went around the world and found that there

Library of Congress

is more prejudice against blacks in most countries than in the US, and Algeria was one example.

Eldridge Cleaver and his group stayed around for a while, in fact a year or so. Then they went on to North Korea, I think. But we had a lot of contact with them. In the first place Cleaver had a baby and had the papers made out to register it American. One couple had...these people were pretty sad, they were actually refugees from justice. They were the ones who had hijacked the plane. They had a baby that was not doing well at all and could not get any treatment in Algeria. They wanted to take it back home where its grandparents could take it over. They couldn't go home, as they would be arrested. So what happened was that Conrad made arrangements to have a stewardess from Air France take the baby to Paris and then pass it along until the baby got back to grandma.

Mrs. Cleaver, Kathy, was a Foreign Service brat. Her father was a senior AID officer. One day he came up to Algiers looking for the "kids" and came to the Embassy. He wanted to know where they were hiding out. I said that they weren't hiding out, we knew where they were and I would gladly give him a car and driver to go see them. He said that Kathleen was very difficult. When she grew up he didn't know what to do with her.

We had a Thanksgiving dinner for local Americans about that time, open house for all Americans. Eldridge came with two or three of his people. He was personable. We had a lot of southerners in the oil fields, and their women were playing up to him...Mr. Cleaver this and Mr. Cleaver that. He was lapping it up. He stayed around for a while but the Algerians treated him badly.

Q: Tell me something about the Algerians. I have heard that they are sort of a special Arab people. How would you characterize them?

MORIN: They are like Lebanese. The reason is because they had a heavy dose of French culture. French culture and Arab culture are a heady mix. They are very oriented towards France despite all the troubles they've had with the French. When Algerians said they

Library of Congress

were going abroad, they meant France. French television programs were carried in Algeria. The Algerian television service showed most of its programs in French, more than in Arabic. The main newspaper, the party paper, El Moujahid, despite its Arabic title, was actually printed in French. The University of Algiers was no longer in the French university system, but continued much as it did before with French teachers. France's largest aid program was in Algeria. They had 10,000 cooperants in Algeria. The countries were very close even despite this bad blood between them.

Of course you have thousands, maybe millions, of Algerians living in France right now. There seems to be a backlash against them in France at the moment. The French brought them up because they would do jobs that the French wouldn't do, and now they are unhappy with them. For a long while they wouldn't let women up, their wives. I don't know if that's changed or not. But when these poor slobbs came back to Algiers they were shaken down for all their money at customs. They had to turn everything into Algerian dinars. They got mistreated at both ends.

I left Algeria and came back to Washington and worked in AF for a year in the regional economics office. An interesting thing I did there was the ambassador's special fund. Each ambassador is given a few thousand dollars to play around with, to help out. They give out basketballs, put a roof on a school, or dig a well. This was different from the AID programs. It was my job to decide the distribution to each country. There were all kinds of hassles with desk officers as they all wanted more money for their countries.

I didn't stay in that job very long. I went over to OEP, Office of Emergency Preparedness, which is a White House office...the trouble shooting office for the White House. It doesn't exist any more. It was responsible for federal programs for disasters...floods, hurricanes, etc., for the oil import program, the domestic oil programs, for nuclear war preparedness and any other problems that would come up.

Library of Congress

If there was a major strike, it was our office that would worry about whatever the Federal government could do and so advise the President. Our boss, General Lincoln, was a member of the National Security Council. It was a great job. I had most interesting stuff.

I worked quite a bit with the strategic stockpile; this was huge stores of materials, 80 different kinds from copper to rubber, several billion dollars worth, held in case we had to fight World War II again. This was a real pork barrel as the reason we now bought and stored manganese or whatever was to support the producers in someone's Congressional district.

One of the big things was when the wage/price freeze was declared.

Q: This was under Nixon wasn't it?

MORIN: Yes. My wife and I were going to Mexico for a week on vacation, and Sunday night I got a call from my boss saying that all leave had been canceled and to come back in. There was a wage/price freeze that was going into effect immediately and we were to manage it. Our office, which wasn't that big, tripled in size in two weeks by borrowing people from all over the government.

You can imagine the questions that kept coming up and had to be decided on the spot. Nixon declared that the price freeze would take effect as he was speaking, a Sunday afternoon. Well I had a case, Youngstown Steel, which had a labor dispute and was in the middle of negotiations. One union had settled and had gotten a raise, but they hadn't finished with the next union. Now they couldn't raise them in line with the first group because of the price freeze. People had shipments underway from abroad...at which point do you consider them under the price freeze? We had frantic calls from places like Florida where hotels were charging the off-season rate because this was August. They wanted to know what would happen in October when it was normal for prices to increase.

Library of Congress

Some teachers sign their contracts in the spring and some in the fall. Well, many of those who signed in the spring had had pay increases, but those who didn't actually sign until the fall couldn't get the increases even though it was a similar job at the same school. State had a problem with local employees...were they subject to the freeze? How about Americans working for American companies abroad? And so on.

It was a time of real pressure on everybody. We got bushels of mail. So, this was a very active period for us.

Another thing I got involved in was the 55 mph speed limit. We were responsible for oil policy, and oil was getting tight with various oil shortages, so we discussed all kinds of things to do. The Director was giving a speech to a group up in New York. He needed a speech and I helped his speechwriter. I added a paragraph saying that one way we could hold down usage in case of an emergency was to adopt a 50 mph speed limit. He kept it in his speech, and lo and behold it was picked up by the AP and went all over the country. We got all sorts of correspondence inquiring what was going on. Some letters were very nasty and critical, while others said it was a great idea.

It started picking up speed. AAA called and asked where we had gotten this idea. I said that I had read a report that said that internal combustion engines are the most efficient at 35 or 40, so I thought 50 was a nice compromise. The White House bought it, and it was finally put into effect at 50.

Then all hell broke loose. The truckers went on strike...50 is too slow for them...and there were shootings along the highways at strikebreakers. We were the office that took care of that type of situation anyway. We had the central command where you sat all day listening to the telephones. Finally an arrangement was worked out. Apparently if you are driving a truck under 55 you have to shift down so there is a real problem at that speed. So the White House raised it to 55. It has been on the books ever since.

Library of Congress

Q: And it has saved a lot of lives.

MORIN: Anyway that is one of those interesting things you get involved with.

The main element, the original reason for the office was nuclear war preparedness. The office used to run these programs on how many Americans would be killed in case of war and how many Russians. We had a large staff working on that. The office was also responsible for continuity of government. We made long lists of who would be in charge in order of succession...number one, number two, all the way down to 20, 30 or 40, figuring that an atom bomb might wipe out a whole group of the population. We ran a hide-away shelter back in the mountains where government officials would go and hide out in case of war. I was supposed to be one. I guess the idea was if the bomb came I would leave my wife to scorch and go hide away in the mountains. We were asked what medicines we took, and they stocked all that. I don't know if you have ever been there but it is like a village. There were more than one of these, but this one was on the way to the Blue Ridge near Leesburg. I would go up by helicopter. It was very impressive. It was a Buck Rogers sort of thing with a huge door opening up in the side of the mountain. A Foreign Service Officer was running it, a retired officer.

OEP was a fascinating place. But the Nixon Administration wanted to cut it back because they were getting criticized at the size of the White House staff. So what they did was break up OEP. They put flood insurance under Interior, other parts were scattered about. I ended up in GSA, General Services Administration, because that took the nuclear power and warfare elements and a couple of others. I think I was the only FSO ever assigned to GSA. I spent a few months there. The job kept getting less and less and my time ran out, and I was transferred back to the Department.

At that time the Inspection Corps had a 3-man team going out to the Arabian peninsula countries. I was asked to fill in because one of the officers couldn't go. I substituted for him on two or three weeks notice.

Library of Congress

We got to Egypt but Nixon was making a trip there and so we were preempted, having to leave after two or three days.

Q: This was his famous trip to Egypt. He was up to his neck in the Watergate scandal so he wanted to head out to a place where they loved him.

MORIN: And they did. All of a sudden there were American flags all over. They washed the streets all the way to the airport. They painted the curbs and fixed up the trees. I went out to the Pyramids and here were these guys all working inside. You've been to the Pyramids, you know you walk up the tunnels and there are these wooden railings. The workmen were sanding them all down. I asked why they were doing that, and they said they didn't want President Nixon to get any slivers in his hands while up there.

We then went to all the Arab peninsula countries, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, etc. It was a great experience for me. I enjoyed being an inspector.

On the way back our chief, fell ill. He had been having a bad time. I could see he was beginning to act strangely. He got very concerned because our ambassador in Greece was questioning something he did on an inspection in Athens, on his previous trip. He got very shaken about it, which wasn't normal. We went back to Egypt and went to Alexandria and did a very short inspection at the end of the trip. There he just couldn't hack it. He was supposed to stop in Naples and inspect the fellow we have there at the Naval Headquarters. He had to beg off of that one.

The other fellow was an audit-qualified inspector so he only did administrative stuff. The chief started working over the inspection results and the final report, and after a few days went up and told our Assistant Secretary that he couldn't do it any more. He was just drawing a blank. He was unable to complete the thing and would have to retire. You know you go overseas for three months and collect all this mass of material, have all your interviews and the poor chief couldn't finish it. So I said I would do it by myself, and I did.

Library of Congress

We were doing the Bureau immediately after, and I was on the four-man team. The Near East Bureau was a big bureau. We had had six inspection teams out doing the posts. My team was responsible for drawing all the reports together to make one report on the Bureau. Well the first thing you know, one team member dropped out, the auditor finished and, out of the blue, the team chief retired and there I was alone again!

I worked like a dog, working until 8 or 9 every night. I had to interview a lot of people in the Bureau itself. People I had missed or didn't know enough about to put all the pieces together. So, I finally got it out but it took all Fall and winter.

I had interesting trips as an inspector...Central America, the Caribbean islands, Korea, Taiwan. The high point was, I think, the three months I spent in India and Nepal. I remember observing the bicentennial Fourth of July on a houseboat in the Vale of Kashmir.

I inspected 30 posts all together and three Bureaus in those three years. I really enjoyed it and could have stayed there forever. But they had a rule you were only supposed to serve two years and then after that they extended me for one more. The Inspector General said that he didn't want to extend me anymore because it was a bad precedent.

From there I went on to...well, I was thinking of retiring...in fact I lined up for a job with one of our retired officers who was in one of the big consulting companies and was looking for people to go out to the various countries to manage development programs. So he had me slated for Port au Prince, to be the leader of a team of people who would be giving administrative support to the Haitian government. Most of them would be French people from the company's Paris office. The company bid on it but someone else won the contract, so I didn't go.

This was fortunate for me because I stayed a little longer in the Department and got a lot more money because we began to get hefty pay raises.

Library of Congress

I did want to leave, however. Ann was not well enough...the Foreign Service life was difficult for her. She really couldn't go overseas anymore. They asked me if I wanted to go to Casablanca as Consul General and I turned it down. I had earlier turned down a good job in Beirut. At least it was supposed to be good. The fellow who had it and who stayed on waiting for a replacement was assassinated along with the ambassador shortly thereafter.

I decided I would work for another year or so and that is how I got into the Human Rights Bureau. Human Rights had just been built up to something under Carter. We had a very dynamic woman, Pat Derian, an excellent person, very competent. She really pushed this. The number two man, Mark Schneider, was a fellow from Ted Kennedy's staff. Many of the people in it were young enthusiastic workers from the presidential campaign. I really believed in the human rights approach and thought we really had to push hard on it. Because what you end up with...you are not going to get everything you are looking for, you're going to settle in the middle. But by pushing hard we established the fact that human rights were a consideration in foreign affairs and they have been ever since.

There was a lot of criticism of the Bureau, as you can imagine.

Q: I was in a country team in South Korea at the time and Dick Sneider, our Ambassador, turned red in the face when you mentioned Pat Derian.

MORIN: I know he did. I was the one who used to send him stuff. They were most unhappy.

Q: How did Pat. Derian operate?

MORIN: Her office was the most relaxed one I have ever been in. She was very informal. Everyone was approachable, you just walked in the door. Everyone was on first name basis. She knew what she wanted. She had certain principles she was following. She thought the State Department people, by and large, were playing games or hesitating...not

Library of Congress

doing what they could do. She appreciated the fact that they had a lot of problems, but nevertheless she knew that if you don't push some of these countries, nothing is going to happen. And she did push. She visited countries and pitched her line directly to the prime ministers and such. I think she was effective.

One of the things that was developed while I was there was the Human Rights Country Report, which was originally established as part of the AID program. Congress required that we have a human rights report on any AID recipient. The first year was pretty slim and then it started growing. Now it is quite a volume which comes out every February. I was there when the first big one came out, the one with a lot of meat to it. We had stuff from all over the world...from Israel, Turkey, Paraguay, Philippines, and all.

And these fellows from the embassies would come streaming in to the Department and complain. At the time, I was on the far eastern desk for our bureau, and I used to get visitors, all these dissident groups from South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Tibet, and the others who would come in and complain about this and that. Although we were sympathetic, we would receive criticism from them because they always wanted much more than we could ever give. We had a very active element among the Filipinos here in Washington who would complain about us all the time. So I was in a very active job for a year or so caught between the dissidents, the home government and the Department's country desk officers.

Q: Here you were an experienced Foreign Service officer dealing with a group of people who came in from the political campaign and civil rights movement, and all, and we are trained to be unemotional and judicial about this, was there a problem in getting them to see things in perspective?

MORIN: They came to understand that you just can't run off at the mouth on this. There were problems...we did have other interests. Pat Derian would attend the Secretary's staff meetings, for instance. They would discuss that we were trying to do this, if you put too

Library of Congress

much pressure, something else was going to happen. We had a base we were trying to keep in the Philippines. We could push them too far and they would demand more money than we could pay. So you have to ease off.

The other thing is that no central government, no prime minister can solve the problems right away even if he wishes to. You're telling him that they are beating up people in prisons and he sort of knows that. He probably isn't doing anything about it because it's a big effort for him. If you push him enough, he knows we're complaining, that we're finding out about it, well, he will then pass the word down and something will happen. You are not going to get all of it to stop, but it will stop for a while in some place or other.

In Indonesia...You remember some years before there was a revolution where the Chinese, the communists...

Q: Yes, in 1965 I think.

MORIN: A large number of them were in prison at the time...a 100,000 or so. They were still in prison in 1979. We kept pressing and pressing until finally they started reconsidering and releasing some of them. So it was working in that case.

Another incident...Portuguese Timor became independent and the Indonesians moved in and took it. Scattered reports were coming out that they were mistreating the inhabitants but no foreigners could go there. We kept pushing the government to let somebody in to look it over. Finally they relented and let one or two of our field people go in. They checked it out and the atrocity stories were true. In fact, they are still going on.

Of course, some of these nationalist movements are just as bad as the governments they are trying to replace as far as human rights are concerned.

Amnesty International was one organization we dealt with a lot.

Library of Congress

Q: What was your impression of Amnesty International?

MORIN: They were really good. They would get in there and find out things. Over the years they had developed a lot of sources. They were able to get a pretty good picture of what was going on. You might say that they might tend to build it up a little more than others would because of their whole slant, but nevertheless they were considered reliable. In some countries they are permitted to go in and make their own investigations, others they are not. The fact that a country refuses, by itself suggests that it is trying to hide something. That is a mark against it. It is surprising how much these countries responded to this. They were unhappy with the kind of report such as we and Amnesty International were making. Dictators, particularly, depend a lot on keeping an international image at a certain level and they found that too much of this criticism starts undermining them. I don't know if it is a matter of sensitive feeling, or what. But it did work. It certainly made our people in the field much more conscious of this.

Priorities for human rights on a scale of one to ten were probably one in 1976 and then Carter came in and started pushing it and built up the human rights office into a real Bureau. I think now you find whenever you read about one of these countries you will see that the human rights element often figures in reports and analyses of them.

Q: You talk about beating up in prisons. Well, American prisons aren't the greatest. Every time we would talk about how awful things were you must have had them throwing back things happening in the States?

MORIN: We are covered by Amnesty International reports too. That is true. The American Indians would come and protest to us too. One group out there has formed a group that claims it is a government-in-exile. They want to know why we are talking about things abroad when there are situations right here at home? People who work in Human Rights are very aware of that and often do something about it. There are internal human rights

Library of Congress

activities too. Trying to straighten out prisons, Indians and everyone else who is under a bad situation.

Q: How were you received by your fellow Foreign Service officers when you would come around?

MORIN: They would get greatly annoyed at times. It got to be a game with the East Asian Bureau. We would do something, and they would try to bypass it.

Q: Richard Holbrooke came in as part of the new Carter wave. He was a very young Assistant Secretary. He and Pat Derian were kind of like contemporaries.

MORIN: She used to annoy the hell out of him. He was trying to do something and had other considerations than human rights. We had big troubles when we started writing the human rights report. Drafts were going back and forth. Even now in Freedom of Information, I see cases on human rights with dozens of drafts of one report.

Q: Israel is one of the preeminent cases of strong political pressure in the United States. Yet there is a problem. There they are dealing with the Palestinians.

MORIN: Well, we used to encounter it on the human rights side. It was basically the West Bank, the occupied territories, part of the country where people were mistreated. Israel itself, at least for the Israelis, is a country with fairly liberal institutions all through it. So we reported about the West Bank and Gaza. Israel has gotten very offended about it all.

Q: Did you feel pressure from the White House at all?

MORIN: Not for this. I think they just said, "Let it go. Let them get mad. There are other things more important."

We did get complaints from Filipinos particularly and the Taiwanese. Each of these has its own opposition elements and they all tend to use harsh methods of keeping down people.

Library of Congress

But it was a good thing for me. I went in there for a year, just filling in time in a sense. I had also worked for a short while on the administration side, in the A Bureau, in personnel classification. I thought I could use that experience if I went out as a consultant. The kind of work I did there was: Who decides what rank people have; how many positions can an office qualify for; why so and so should be a GS-13 instead of a GS-12 and so forth. We were reviewing the Foreign Service. I did the economic officers, worldwide, rating them...not the people but the jobs. I had enough of that in three months. That is terrible work. No one is your friend in that.

I retired at that point, after Human Rights, and started work right away in the Freedom of Information Office and have been there ever since. It has been 13 years now. I have been there a lot longer than in any other place. I have been the senior reviewer for the Middle East now for several years. In fact, I was the first senior reviewer. The office started because when Freedom of Information took off in the seventies, the Bureaus just couldn't handle it. So an inspection team made recommendations that there be a separate office staffed by retired Foreign Service officers to handle the areas they were familiar with and do it on behalf of each Bureau. So that is the way it started up and I got into it early.

It is a massive job. The Department gets 5,000 requests a year. It's very legalistic work, you have to justify everything that you delete or deny. You have to make a legal case for it. It can be appealed and you have to do it over again. Then a requester can go to court, and he or she often does, and you have to write these legal briefs which can be a hundred pages long. Every document in there has to be explained to the judge as to why it shouldn't be released. You have to make a pretty good case because they don't want just blanket language saying it is important or sensitive. They want to know why it is sensitive.

It can be sometimes a tedious job, but on the other hand it can be very interesting. For example, when you get a request for a case on something like the Suez Canal, you have all the documents for two years or so altogether and it can be fascinating to follow it

Library of Congress

through. In addition to denying those we think are too sensitive to release, we can release some in part by deleting sensitive portions.

This represents an awful lot of paperwork. It is possible for one requested document to lead to producing ten other papers because we have to refer to other agencies, CIA, AID, Commerce and so forth who have an equity in the same document. Send out a memo and a memo comes back. It builds up and mushrooms into a big thing. The requester has to count on waiting for about a year to get anything. And then the Presidential Libraries have their files and all their releases have to be cleared with us, all the sensitive presidential papers. It goes on and on. Anyway I'm still there.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much. Is there anything else you would like to say?

MORIN: I think we've covered everything.

Q: Okay.

End of interview